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POEMS
BY
WILLIAM RICE

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With a Portrait and
an Introduction by
A Dickson Patterson

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J. J. P. P. P.
1898

Introduction

THE picturesque personality of the author of these poems had long attracted me. One day, by the instrumentality of pure cheek, I made for myself the acquaintance of Mr. Rice, and lured him into my studio. I then broached the subject of making a portrait study of him; but he objected, on the ground that his "phiz" would be of no interest to anybody,—that was to say, not unless his "book" were published. What book? I discovered then that we had a Poet in our midst!... The opportunities I sought were afterwards afforded me, and the portrait and the poems now appear together. These have been selected from a number that are in manuscript, and form a First Part.

25.7
I trust that the Public, not usually too indulgent to poets, will be generously disposed to buy the little book; for, besides the interest to be found in the poems themselves, there is the satisfaction of aiding an old gentleman, past four-score years, whose accumulated treasure is knowledge only; and not that of which it is written, "the moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves break through and steal."

A. D. PATTERSON

10 Elmsley Place
Dec. 1898

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A Poem

On the Falls of Niagara

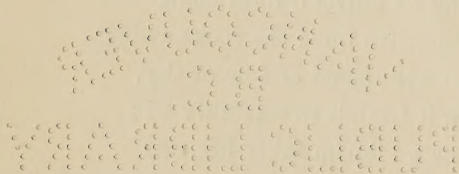
I heard the Waters roar,—
I heard the Flood of Ages pass away.

—H. K. White.

The Proem

It soothes the spirits to repose
Where rolling wave or water flows,
And breathes a soft and airy spell
Of hours and days remember'd well :—
The thin pellucid liquid seems
Transparent in a flood of dreams !
In beams of light and silvery hue
It rushes on the gazer's view,
Bearing its mirror'd form along
With massive force, the rocks among.
Tinted with cloud or tree or sky,
On, on it bounds so smoothly by ;
And, as a Pilgrim takes his way,
Through climes remote and regions gay,

So on by coral beds it strays,
 Or rocky steep it slumbering lays ;
 Now hurrying on, now ling'ring slow
 'Mong tiny shells where lilies grow,
 It laves the sands of thousand isles ;
 And where the choicest foliage smiles,
 Murmurs in lightsomeness and glee
 As birds 'mong flow'rs or humming bee.
 Anon it seeks some cavern'd shore
 Where hollow winds are heard to roar,
 Whose wild base trembles with the blast,
 The howling tempest scarcely past,
 And glides, death-like into the sea—
 An emblem of Eternity.



The Poem

Stupendous volume, mighty sea
 That thunders down eternally
 Into the vortices below,
 Boiling and seething white as snow ;
 Where it heaves and shakes and rages
 As it has done thus for ages.
 It rolls so slow, so grand sublime
 As if a record of all time
 Whose chasm deep, perchance has stood
 From the Creation or the Flood ;
 And as its ocean o'er it falls
 O'er its wave worn rocky walls
 O'er its mighty precipice
 What cataract is like to this ?
 Whilst all around dark mists descry
 From th' watery artillery,
 Spreading its surf with awful din
 O'er all th' expanse milk white and thin :
 For tossing there t'will ever be
 A type of war eternally.
 Then rising forth ascends on high
 A cloudy vapour to the sky,

Upon whose hazy sheet expands
 Along th' American and Canadian lands
 A playful Iris with its sheen,
 Red, purple, yellow, blue and green,
 A sylph-like fairy, that might spring
 From out the wave on golden wing
 Whose livery such beauty bears
 As nothing mortal ever wears.
 Above, are rippling leaping waves ;
 Beneath, the roaring cataract raves ;
 And waters skip for miles about
 As dancers at a ball or rout,
 Or like an army as they come
 (Though such take fife and trumpet and drum
 And flashing steel or scimitar
 Th' insignia of the sons of war).
 Stretching far out their lines you see
 And on they flow regularly,
 Then they turn or halt or bend
 Those breakers to the maelstrom tend,
 Whilst others leap, or plunge, or fret,
 Scattering around their angry jet.
 Some falls come foaming o'er the cliff
 Light as the bound of salient skiff ;
 But some seem hoary weird and gray,

A changing myst'ry on their way;
 Some shady seem, or dubious shine,
 As ore just quarried from the mine,
 And some in wavy streaks appear
 As water'd ribbon ladies wear;
 Now orange, lilac, and now pink
 Are interwoven in the link.
 Then some as emeralds green and bright,
 Tintured with everlasting light.
 But 'tis a spectre, 'tis a pow'r
 Mingling its hues with every hour,
 No minute, much less day or year,
 It scarcely will the same appear;
 Now gaunt and grim, now dark and black,
 Then lighting up, as lightning's track—
 A wat'ry Demon varying
 As if of cataracts the King.
 Some crested runners seem to feign
 The barking dogs of Pluto's reign;
 Or Cerberus has left his cavern
 And made the cataract his tavern,
 Whose yelping curs are in the chase
 And fancy sees them all in place.
 Above impatient seems the tide—
 Below how stately see it glide

Certes some distance from the rocks
And falling of the wat'ry shocks
The Niagara, slow and solemn,
Like a sable funeral column,
Or a hearse with nodding plumes
Then its destined course assumes,
Between her far down dizzy steeps
Steeper than feudal moats or keeps.

An Iota to Fancy

My Gipsy sweet, now greet mine ears
 With incantations from the spheres
 Most blandly mild, careering wild
 To soothe thy vot'ry as a child.
 Then raise thine eye unto the sky
 And such things there as thou shalt spy,
 Them straight to me, my fair, descry.
 Or take a turn into some dell
 And what thou seest there me tell;
 Or lovers young, or linnets free,
 Or roses sweet, or cypress tree.
 Or on the sea spread forth thy sail
 To catch the morn or evening's gale,
 And as thou mayest push thy way
 To other shores that distant lay.
 But in a mad fantastic plight
 Play in the beams of Ether light,
 And sport in drops of crystal dew
 Of colours rich and ever new,
 And gaze on forms divinely fair,
 Such as not human mould may share,
 Whose looks are heavenly free from care !

O Tempora, O Mores !!

Life is to me
 Mortality
 Without its rest,
 What is't to me
 On earth to be
 To be unblest.
 Yet let not man
 In aught that can
 Disturb my reign
 Presume to pry
 Or question why
 I live in vain.
 This earthly ball
 It is not all
 The end not yet :
 When I am gone
 And laid alone
 I'll it forget.
 But yet anon
 The ages flown
 A day will come :
 Then life once more
 Will leap ashore
 And find a home !

Not such as this,
 With patch'd up bliss,
 And some excuse,
 But golden streets,
 Ambrosial sweets,
 Celestial use !

Ne'ertheless a doubt,
 It will peep out,
 If there's a hell ?

If not Divine
 It will be thine
 Therein to dwell !

Then what's the good
 Of all the Blood
 That has been spilt ;
 The Saviour's cry,
 The Gospel nigh,
 And mortal tilt ?

The ages gone,
 And that yet on,
 Are still to run :
 That that is past
 And that to last
 Beyond the sun.

Say is't in vain,
We try to gain,
The Life to come ?
The world awhile
May frown or smile
What then ? The Tomb !

Let no false glare
Thy passions share
The lust of eye
Or pride of life
Engend'ring strife,
But pass them bye ?

Remember well,
That magic spell,
In which were found :
As we must die
Assuredly,
To rise were bound !

So not in vain
If we attain
The state we may,
For if we try
The reasons why,
We'll find the way !

Arbor Vitæ

The Tree of Life, that Heavenly Tree
That blooms for ever more,
Its living green I long to see
And use its golden store :
And breathe the fragrance that it breathes,
Its healing leaves apply
And bask beneath its clust'ring wreaths
In its ambrosial sky ;
Then say, and is it here I am,
Am I now safely here,
Then all's attained ! God and the Lamb
For evermore revere !!!

**On the Loss of the Screw Steam Vessel
"City of Glasgow"**

In which I crossed the Atlantic in the month of March, 1853.

Speak sulky silence, and let mortals know
What means have led to her sad fatal lot.
Will nothing tell, and say that it was so ;
That thus it was, or thus that it was not ?
Thou silent sea ! Thou bear'st thee as the grave,
Mute, mute as death, is all beneath thy wave.
My feet have trod her decks from stem to stern—
Yea safely was I ferried o'er in thee—
And now thy fate I fain alas would learn
Of circling ills that seal'd thy destiny :
If icebergs crush'd, or if the mountain deeps
O'erwhelm'd thee in their avalanche-like steep.
That I across the wave was safely borne
I thankful am to Him whom winds and waves
Obey, but yet by gratitude am drawn
To mourn a vessel that the tempest braves,
Though now those mountain deeps she skims no more,
Nor dashes her thin prow by sea or shore.
A sunken hidden rock, did she not strike,
And sudden settling, sink vast fathoms down ;
Or spring a leak, which perhaps is less unlike,
In the deep noon of night, and quickly drown

The passengers, and all but unawares,
 As well those hardy fellows jolly tars ?
 Upon the deck perchance was mirth and fun
 Nor mortal wight amongst them dreaded aught,
 Or did distress and anguish on them run,
 As mountain waves the vessel fiercely caught
 And bore aloft into the cloudy world
 To plunge her down in double ruin hurled.
 How bore those souls, their sad and dreadful scene,
 Did terror shake them, or did manhood rise ?
 Lo ! see the captain, courage in his mien,
 Yet perhaps no hope within his bosom lies,
 His mates and men like him are brave and cool,
 Yet Neptune scoffs when once resolved to rule.
 Once more the voyagers, oh dreadful host,
 Unused to sea and to its treatment rough,
 At least a many of them, now they're tost
 About in wildness, some are stern enough,
 Meanwhile regardless of their desp'rate thrall
 Dark ocean yawns, and deep engulfs them all.
 'Tis over now, they've met their fate, or well
 Or ill ; a dirge or requiem for the dead,
 And consolation to their friends may tell
 A soothing tale, and raise the drooping head :
 And let us ponder this, that all must die—
 Their conflict's o'er, our's yet has to draw nigh !

Io Iacche

Fill your glasses jolly boys,
 Brim them with our sparkling joys,
 Nectar sip, jest, quirk and quaff,
 Giggle on to volley'd laugh !
 How soon the day to night will turn !
 The living moulder in an urn.

 Laugh and all our cares forget !
 All the pestiferous set
 Who would harmless mirth decrease,
 Curses on them never cease !
 How soon the day to night will turn—
 The living moulder in an urn.

Τῆ ἀρχῇ.

It far exceeds the powers of man
With all his vast perceptions here,
A beginning that ne'er began,
To comprehend or know it clear.

Τὸ φῶς.

How beautiful unto mine eye,
How glorious in its majesty !
But to my soul it speaks of thee,
Of thee, of thee, eternally !

The Mountain Echo

A voice from the Fountains,
A voice from the Sea,
Says come to the mountains,
Come, come unto me.

Fair visions are ours
Thou knowest full well,
And ours the powers
That thou mayest tell,

As we rove in the mist
Or glance on the snow
Disregarding the grist
Of mortals below.

And we take in our way
Each mark as it comes,
Or sadder or gay,
Or grottoes or tombs.

The lilies and flowers
That blow o'er the dead
We pluck in the hours
That by them we tread.

Each bright thing we love,
Or terribly grand,
In Heaven above
Or 'neath upon land.

And Heaven's own sphere
Even that we explore,
And then disappear
To fathom no more.

Ad Cadendum Solem

Those long low lines of vivid red
 That gild the sun's course to his bed,
 Streaking his path, a mingled blaze
 Of purpling most concentrated rays
 As 'neath he sinks the western deep
 And leaves our Hemisphere to sleep
 When care and sorrow may subside
 By chance as flows the human tide,
 But yet the Sun his path still takes,
 Although he seems to hide, still wakes
 Where'er he meets Nights on his way
 He turns them all to shining Day.

***The Robin**

I've heard the Robin sing
 For the first time this spring.
 His sweet and pleasant voice
 Now bids the year rejoice.
 Then hail the Red-breast bird,
 Whose melody is heard
 Warbling so mild and clear
 At the op'ning of the year.

* His transatlantic confrere is less robust ; one of whom I was wont to entertain with crumbs on my window sill every morning, and he, without any appearance of fear would turn his little head and squint at me, as much as to say "Thank you."

Grief is fantastical and loves the dead,
And the apparel of the grave,

—*The two Foscari*—Byron.

“Vita summa brevis spem nos velat incohare longam.”

—Horace, L. I. C. IV.

Psalm lxxxix. 48. : עַל-מַח־שׁוֹא בְּרָאָהּ לֹל-בְּנֵי-אָדָם :

Solitary, sad and lone
Like a mourner on a stone
In church yard sitting,
I run o'er the days gone by,
And with the moaning winds I sigh,
And 'tis befitting
To think that all of man should dwell
In Death's cold dark and narrow cell.

The above is only a *primâ facie* view however.

To the Departing Year 1854 a Bumper !

Old Eighteen-fifty-four, farewell !
I watch awhile to hear the bell
That chiming peals thy midnight knell.
Here's to the new year, here's to thee,
And mayest thou better, better be
Than all thy myriad ancestry !

New York, Dec. 31, 12 p.m.

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On the Poet Cowper

Cowper, delight of all the just on Earth !
 For Piety was thine and genuine worth :
 The Muses flowery wreath adorn'd thy brow,
 A Heavenly Diadem invests it now :
 Strains sweet as ever smote a mortal's ear,
 Thy Lyre, caught from another world, resounded here.

La Vie Eternelle

Eternal Life ! This is the Theme,
 There's nothing real excepting this.
 Of every man of sense the Dream,
 Who knows this Life is vanished bliss.

Ad Finem.

When time hath sped on to its goal
 Delay no more will be allowed.
 Thunders will then be heard to roll
 And God be seen upon a cloud.
 Lift up your heads, and then look up,
 Disconsolate no more to be,
 Earth's forward ways are all broke up,
 And blessings reign eternally.

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